According to the Islamic statement of faith, or shahada, “There is no god but Allah.” Muslims believe Allah created the world in six days and sent prophets such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and, lastly, Muhammad. Believers must worship only Allah, and reject all other, false gods.

Islam, which means submission, was not at first the name of a specific religion, founded by Muhammad. It referred, rather, to the original religion of all mankind – and even of the universe itself which, like us, was created to serve Allah.

According to Islamic belief, earlier prophets before Muhammad were all Muslims, or submitters to Allah. Some prophets received scriptures from Allah, notably the Torah of Moses, the Psalms of David and the Gospel of Jesus. Their messages and books, however, became corrupted or were lost.

Muslims believe that the scriptures revealed to Muhammad – the Quran, the very word of Allah – will not suffer this fate. Thus, there is no need for further prophets or revelations.
The Lord of the Worlds

The Quran refers to Allah as the Lord of the Worlds. Unlike the biblical Yahweh — sometimes misread as Jehovah — he has no personal name. Instead, he is known by 99 titles, including the Creator, the King, the Almighty and the All-Seer.

Allah is also the Master of the Day of Judgment, when the good, especially believers, will be sent to their heavenly reward, and the wicked, especially unbelievers, will be dispatched to hellfire. Muslims claim to reject anthropomorphic descriptions of Allah that picture him as someone with human form. Yet, the Quran describes him as speaking, sitting on a throne and having a face, eyes and hands.

Muslims believe nothing can ever happen unless it is caused or at least permitted by Allah. For that reason, when making plans of any kind, Muslims typically say in sha' allah (God willing).

If matters go well, one says al-hamdu li-llah (Thanks be to Allah). In their prayers and on other occasions — including battles and street protests — Muslims declare that Allah is the greater than anything else: "Allahu akbar."

The word Allah is usually thought to mean “the God” (al-ilah) in Arabic. All Muslims and most Christians acknowledge that they believe in the same god even though their understandings differ. Arabic-speaking Christians call God Allah.

One and the same

Addressing Christians and Jews, the Quran declares, “Our God and your God are one.” The name Allah was evidently used by pre-Islamic Jews and Christians for God. Indeed, the Quran even criticizes Christians for identifying Allah with Christ and both Jews and Christians for calling themselves children of Allah.

Allah is not a trinity of three persons, unlike the Christian God, who is at one and the same time the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Nor does Allah have a son who was incarnated — made flesh — as a man, as Jesus was. For those reasons, some Christians deny that Allah is the god they worship. Yet they seem sure that Jews worship the same god as Christians, even though Jews also reject the Trinity and the incarnation.

Some Christians also argue that the New Testament’s Jesus and the Quran’s Jesus are different historic individuals. The Jesus described in the Quran is not divine and was not crucified, but instead deceived his enemies and went straight to heaven.
From polytheism to monotheism

Before the revelation of the Quran, Allah was recognized mostly by polytheists, who believed in the existence of multiple gods. Some have therefore claimed that Allah cannot be God because he was originally part of a polytheistic religious system. However, this argument ignores the polytheistic origins of Judaism and, by extension, Christianity.

Biblical writers identified the Canaanite high god El with their own god, even though El originally ruled over a large pantheon of gods. In both the Old and New Testament, the words used for the Judeo-Christian God — El or Elohim — as well as the Greek "theos" and Latin "deus," can also be used for other gods. The word "god" is itself a Germanic term.

So Jewish, Christian and Islamic understandings of the divinity have polytheistic origins. Just like Jews and Christians, however, Muslims believe that the religion of the first humans, Adam and Eve, was monotheistic, or focused on a single god. Because it was corrupted into polytheism, Allah sent prophets who all taught that there is only one God.

Islam took over from Judaism the notion that Abraham, in particular, was the one who rediscovered monotheism and rejected the worship of false gods. Thus, Muhammad sought to restore the authentic monotheism of Abraham from which even Jews and Christians had strayed.

Human power over others

The reason why there are different ideas about the nature of God is surely not that humans have strayed from an original revelation. Rather, these beliefs are human constructions and reconstructions that reflect our own rationalizations, hopes, fears and ambitions.

At times, particular groups of people have used their religion to assert their rights over others. They do so on the grounds that they have been uniquely favored by God with authentic revelation. That seems to be why some Christians deny that Allah is just another name for God. It also explains Malaysian Muslim efforts to prevent Malaysian Christians from referring to God as Allah. In both cases, a broader understanding of God threatens the dominance of one particular religious group.
Quiz

1. A central idea of the article is developed by:
   (A) explaining how Muslims practice their faith
   (B) contrasting elements of Islam with other religions
   (C) defining monotheistic and polytheistic religions
   (D) highlighting the religious symbols of Christianity

2. According to the article, Allah determines what happens to people when they die. Which paragraph in the section “The lord of the worlds” BEST supports the idea above?

3. Which of the following ideas is BEST supported by the section “One and the same”?
   (A) Christians believe that Jews worship the same God, despite believing different things about Jesus.
   (B) The Quran features a version of Jesus that Christians disagree with because he went to heaven.
   (C) Muslims do not believe in the Trinity because Allah did not have children.
   (D) Christianity, Judaism and Islam all believe that they are children of Allah.

4. Which of these sentences would be MOST important to include in an objective summary of the article?
   (A) Many Christians believe that the Jesus in the Quran is a different person than the one in the New Testament.
   (B) Some people claim that Allah cannot be God because he was once recognized by polytheists.
   (C) Muslims give thanks to Allah when things go well for them by saying “al-hamdu li-llah.”
   (D) Islam means submission, and the word was not originally the name of a specific religion.